DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 316 342 PS 018 636

TITLE	PTA Reports: Child Care in the '90s. A Special Redbook Supplement.
INSTITUTION	National PTA, Chicago, Ill.
PUB DATE	90
NOTE	15p.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Background; Check Lists; *Day Care; *Delivery Systems; Early Childhood Education; *Employer Supported Day Care; *Selection

ABSTRACT

This PTA report on child care in the 1990s offers advice to parents who face the dilemma of finding appropriate child care. Contents focus on: (1) America's child care crisis; (2) assessment of options; (3) a checklist on what to look for in a day care center; and (4) ways employers can help deal with the child care crisis. Included is a PTA research questionnaire on attitudes toward the National PTA's Childcare Reports. (RH)

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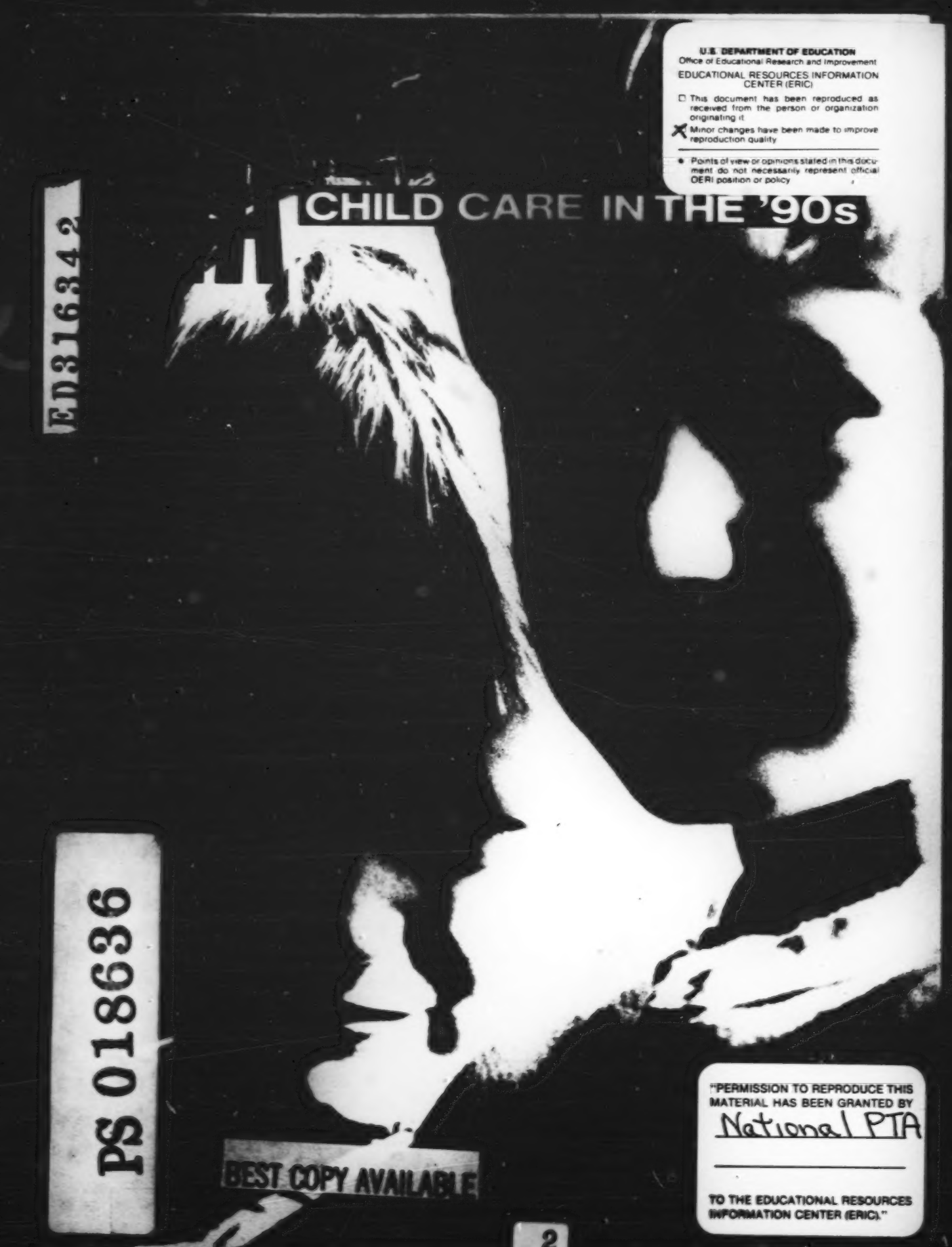
CHILD CARE IN THE '90s



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PTA REPORTS:

CHILD CARE IN THE '90s

Introduction

With its more than 6.6 million members, the PTA has joined forces with Redbook and the sponsors listed below to highlight one of the most important issues facing Americans today: child care. This special Redbook supplement offers advice to parents facing the difficult dilemma of finding appropriate child care.

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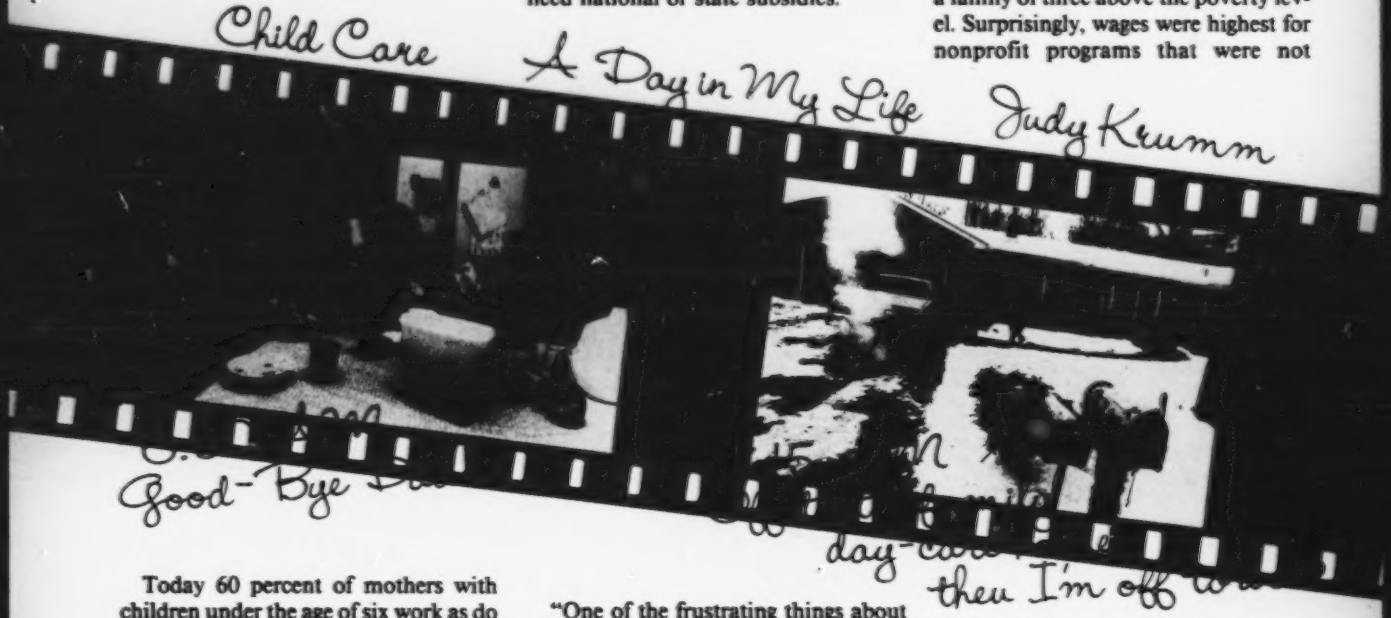
AMERICA'S CHILD-CARE CRISIS

When historians 100 years from now look back on America in the 1980s, they will likely dub this the decade when Mom got a job. In the 1970s an increasing number of women stayed in the labor force once they married and returned to work once they had children. But in the 1980s, the floodgates opened and mothers who worked outside the home became the rule rather than the exception.



Today 60 percent of mothers with children under the age of six work as do well over 50 percent of mothers of infants. Some experts predict that within a few years two-thirds of the mothers of preschoolers will be employed.

But who is looking after the children while their mothers work? What kind of care are these children getting? How can the level of care be improved? These questions are beginning to concern more and more Americans.

"Today the issue isn't whether mothers should work or not," says Ann Lynch, National PTA president. "Yes, some mothers can and do choose to stay home, but the vast majority can't or don't. Therefore, the issue is how to help children and parents deal with this fact of modern-day life. This means helping parents find excellent care as well as helping them cope in both their family and work roles."

What is the Status of Child Care in America Today?

"Deplorable!" says T. Berry Brazelton, M.D., one of America's leading pediatricians in a recent interview with the PTA. "It's dangerous. Young families with two parents working can rarely afford to pay for quality care and need national or state subsidies."

"One of the frustrating things about the child-care situation is that it varies so greatly," adds Lynch. "There are excellent child-care programs in this country. Many are costly, but some aren't. But there aren't enough good ones, and, as Dr. Brazelton points out, many parents can't afford even mediocre programs, let alone good ones.

"My feeling is that the most critical needs are excellent child care for infants, for disadvantaged children, and, surprisingly enough, for school-age children," continues Lynch.

"The number-one cause of low quality programs is poor care givers," says Lynch. "A good care giver can overcome a great many deficiencies in any program, but nothing can make up if the care givers aren't high quality."

A report released in late 1989 by the Child Care Employee Project from Oakland, California, sheds light on why some care givers are not top quality. The study found that, when adjusted for inflation, the average wage of child-care teachers has dropped 27 percent since 1977. Today the average hourly wage for child-care teachers is $5.35. This is less than enough to keep a family of three above the poverty level. Surprisingly, wages were highest for nonprofit programs that were not church-related—$6.40 an hour—and lowest for those in profit-making chains—$4.10 per hour.

Because of the abominably low wage, the turnover rate of child-care workers is high and getting higher all the time. According to the Oakland study, the turnover rate of child-care workers in 1977 was 15 percent. By 1989 it had spiraled to 41 percent—74 percent in the profit-making chains.

Who Needs Help Most

Experts agree that all children need high-quality care, but it's clear that no groups need it more than infants and disadvantaged children. *(Continued)*

A debate has been raging for years among experts about whether child care is harmful for babies. While earlier studies of older children in day care seemed to find no major problems, a recent study has been interpreted to show that children under the age of a year who are cared for by someone other than their mothers are less likely to be as attached to their mothers than are those who are cared for by their mothers full-time.

Other child development specialists have questioned both the study's findings and methodology. Undoubtedly the experts will continue to wrangle for years over the effect of child care outside the family, but one thing that they all agree on is that poor-quality programs can be damaging.

While the effect of child care on infants isn't clear, it is clear from numerous studies that excellent programs can have a lifelong positive effect on disadvantaged children. Through the Perry Preschool Project that began in 1962, a group of black, low-income children in Ypsilanti, Michigan, were enrolled in a high-quality preschool program. These children were followed up at age nineteen. It was found that those who had participated in this program were less likely to drop out of school, commit crimes, have teenage pregnancies and need special education services. They were also more likely to go to college or get jobs than were their peers.

"It seems clear that money spent on high-quality programs for disadvantaged children will pay off for them and for society in the long run," says Lynch. Sadly, though, high-quality programs are expensive and least likely to be found in the areas with high rates of poverty and other social problems. Thus the parents of disadvantaged children rarely can find or afford to pay for worthwhile programs.

Many parents also find it difficult to find and afford programs for school-age children. It has been estimated that between two and seven million children spend a part of each day at home alone waiting for their parents to get home from work. These "latchkey children" can be found in every community and class in America.

Many child-care experts recommend against children under the age of 12 being left at home alone for long periods of time. Studies have shown that some latchkey children are frightened, bored and lonely at home. Since many parents insist that their children stay inside when they are home alone, these children are cut off from exercise, fun and playmates. Many spend their time watching TV, snacking and waiting.

Some parents leave their children at home alone because they can't afford care. Many can't find it. Other parents, though, leave their children at home alone because they think their nine-, ten- and 11-year-olds are mature enough to care for themselves.

One way to provide good affordable care for latchkey children and to encourage parents not to leave their youngsters unsupervised is to institute school-age child-care projects. Hundreds of schools and community groups have set up such projects, but many more are needed. A 1988 survey of principals by the National Association of Elementary School Principals found that 84 percent of the principals thought that children in their communities needed some kind of supervision, but only 22 percent of their schools offered any such care.

Parent and community pressure for such programs and for adequate supervision of youngsters seems to be growing. According to the most recent Gallup Poll of public attitudes toward the public schools, 71 percent of the public supports after-school and summer programs for students whose parents work, and 57 percent are willing to pay part of the cost by increased taxes.

How Can We Solve the Crisis?

"If we want to do what is best for our children, we must be sure that there are enough good and affordable child-care programs," says Lynch. "Since the care givers are the key to good programs, we must work to raise wages—these dedicated, caring people deserve a living wage—and we must assure that care givers are well trained and likely to stay long enough for children to benefit."

What will it take to get this care for America's children? Lots of money, of course, but also a combined effort of parents, nonparents, government, schools, community leaders and employers. Concludes Lynch, "We must all work together to solve America's child-care crisis—to assure that high-quality care is available for all, for babies in Watts, school-age children in Stamford, and four-year-olds in Indianapolis. Our children's well-being affects more than just their lives and the lives of their families. Their well-being will have an important influence on the course of our nation's future."□

ASSESSING YOUR OPTIONS

7:20 AM
We let our children help us decide about day care

What kind of child care is best for your children and for you? That is a tough question for any parent to answer. You will have to consider carefully your children's ages and needs, your lifestyle, expectations and budget as well as what is available in your community.

Today more than 40 percent of children who are cared for by someone other than their parents are in what is called "family day care." They are in the home of another person—usually a woman—who might be a grandparent or other relative or a nonfamily member. Family day-care homes may or may not be state licensed. Family day-care providers are often young mothers who care for a few children in addition to their own youngsters. Most often when parents talk about taking their children "to the sitter," they really mean to a family day-care home.

The second most popular option is care of children in their own home by a babysitter. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 30 percent of children under age five whose mothers work are cared for at home. In many of these cases, care is by a relative such as a grandmother. Most babysitters arrive in the morning and leave when the parents return from work. Only a small percentage of children are cared for by live-in babysitters—a nanny or someone such as a college student who trades child care for room, board and a modest salary.

A third option is group care in a day-care center or preschool or school-age child-care center. Only about 15 percent of children under five with working mothers are cared for in such facilities. Group-care centers may be run by nonprofit groups such as community or religious organizations, colleges and universities or by profit-making organizations.

What Limits Your Options?

Often parents' child-care options are severely limited by the age of their children, by what is available in their community and by what they can afford. Because of these limitations, many parents are unable to find the type of child care they really want at a price they can afford. Often, they have to take second best or depend on more than one type of care—often patching together a complex arrangement that might include preschool plus family day care and a little help from Grandma.

Care for infants is hardest to find and most expensive, but it is also often difficult to find care for school-age children during nonschool hours or school vacations. Many group centers don't accept infants or school-age children. Besides, many parents are hesitant to take a tiny baby to a large center, while many school-age children are unhappy about going to a day-care center with a bunch of preschoolers.

In some communities there are few day-care centers or only a limited number of spots in centers. While nonprofit and commercial enterprises such as Kinder-Care Learning Centers have increased in number across the country, some geographic areas, especially cities in the Northeast, still do not have enough centers for children needing care.

Parents seeking family day care often find that there is no easy way to locate providers. While group-care centers are generally listed in the phone book, family day-care providers aren't. State licensing agencies can give you a list of licensed homes in your area, but since the vast majority of homes are not licensed, this may be of little help. In some areas community organizations such as the YWCA or even a few employers have set up resource and referral services to help parents find care. Usually, though, parents are on their own—dependent on their own initiative, resources and luck plus tips from others—when it comes to finding family day care.

Cost often limits parents' options. Many parents would prefer to have a babysitter come to their home, but this type of care is the most expensive as well as most difficult to find. While

other forms of child care are less expensive, they still take a sizable chunk out of any family income and often place a nearly impossible strain on the budgets of one-parent families.

What's Best for Your Children?

Parents, looking to the experts for guidance on what is best for their children, would like hard-and-fast rules such as "don't send infants to group care" or "use only licensed family day-care homes." Sadly, though, such agreed-upon rules are not available. Instead, parents are usually told that the type of care is less important than the qualities of the care provider and how well the care meets the needs of the individual children.

Alison Clarke-Stewart, who has conducted extensive research on the effects of various types of day care, reports her findings in *Daycare*. She concludes that "the best kind of care varies according to the individual needs of the child" and that the quality of the care giver or care givers is the most important factor determining the quality of care. Thus, while child-staff ratios and other factors are important, they are not as important as whether the care giver is actively involved in talking and playing with the children, responds well to children's interests and questions, provides positive encouragement and reassurance (not continual criticism) and allows children freedom to explore and try new things. Such qualities of the care giver can be found in any type of care. Therefore, parents should worry less about the type of care they select than about the quality of the people who provide the care.

Sandra Scarr, author of *Mother Care/Other Care*, comes closer to setting guidelines, but she also qualifies her advice. She writes that "[family day-care homes] that are properly run by competent and kindly care givers can be the preferred form of care for babies and toddlers. [But this type of care] is not as desirable for most preschoolers [aged three to five] who can enjoy and take advantage of the larger peer group and educational programs that are more typical of day-care centers." Scarr goes on to say that even "babies and toddlers may get along perfectly well in a day-care center that specializes in making a homelike atmo-

sphere for their little ones." The only real problem Scarr sees in having infants and toddlers in a high-quality group-care center is that day-care children run an increased risk of catching colds, flu and other contagious diseases from other children.

Experts suggest that a babysitter who comes to the parents' home might be ideal for small babies since that would allow the babies to stay in the home environment. But to be good for a small child, a sitter must have the same qualifications as other good care givers, and high-quality babysitters are in short supply.

Even more than in other types of care, quality of care by a babysitter rests on the quality of that individual. A babysitter is alone with a child all day, so all responsibility for stimulating and interacting with the child rests on the sitter. Care in the parents' home is the least visible type of care—it isn't like a day-care center or even a family day-care home where parents are coming and going throughout the day and where there probably are other children for the baby to interact with.

Parents don't really know if a babysitter is playing with, talking to and

8:00 AM
They've adapted to our plan and deal with it very well

tending their children all day or if the sitter is spending the day in front of the television. So having a babysitter at home may or may not be ideal for a small child.

The strengths of a good family day-care home depend on the qualities of the care giver as well as the number and age of the children cared for and the equipment and facilities available. At its best, this type of care can provide children with love, attention, playmates and experience with a different family. Its more flexible schedule allows for adaption to an infant's individual sleep and eating patterns.

So family day care may be ideal, especially for young children, but a mother who cares for five or six children under the age of five including two babies (the maximum number of children and infants that many state licensing laws allow) or even more children and babies doesn't have much time for playing with or responding to each child. *(Continued)*

Since the vast majority of family day-care providers are not licensed, conditions in their homes vary greatly. Some run excellent operations where children are surrounded by affection, lots of stimulation, interesting books and toys and friendly faces. In other cases, the providers are overworked, harried, untrained and unable to respond to more than the very basic needs of the children. Occasionally, providers, who have little time or experience or toys and equipment, fall back on authoritarian discipline and want children to spend the day sitting silently or watching television. Even when the provider is well prepared and has time, this care takes place in a private home. Since private homes are less open to public view there is more possibility of abuse.

Good day-care centers tend to be more stable and more easily monitored by parents. Their staff is more likely to have some training in child development. They usually have planned activities that aim at providing intellectual stimulation for children. They may have more diverse materials

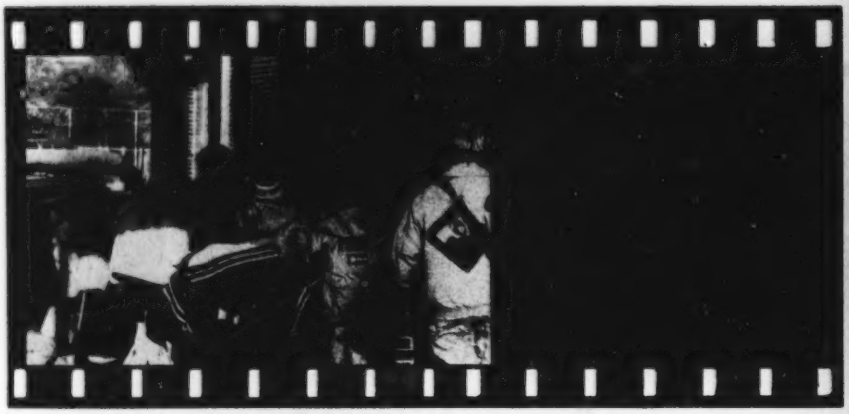
and equipment and more room for children to play and explore. But as with the other forms of care, the quality of a group-care center depends largely on the staff that is offering the care. Recent studies by the Oakland, California-based Child Care Employees Project, which found shockingly low wages paid to staff at many day-care centers as well as the high turnover rate—as high as 74 percent turnover a year for profit-making centers—explain why it is very difficult to get and to keep top-notch staff.

Studies of high-quality day-care programs show that they increase children's intellectual development, maturity and social competence more than family day care, but bad centers can be overcrowded, dirty, noisy warehouses where children put in their time waiting to go home.

The key to finding good child care is to find a good care giver. And the sad truth is that it is harder to judge the true quality of people than it is to judge whether a home or center is clean, safe and well stocked with toys.□

A CHECKLIST OF WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A DAY-CARE CENTER

Choosing the right child-care center is not easy, and parents should be well informed before making the final decisions. Here are some suggestions from the National PTA to help parents find and evaluate a quality day-care center.



☐ GATHER INFORMATION

Ask everyone you know for guidance—your PTA, neighbors, coworkers, librarian, family doctor. Find out about locations that will be convenient for you and your schedule and that will meet your children's needs. Check into various rates and determine in advance what you can afford. Decide the size and type of center you are looking for.

☐ CONFIRM LICENSING

Make sure the center is properly licensed or accredited by contacting your state's department of family services. Keep in mind that a state license does not guarantee a quality program. In most states, requirements represent the minimally acceptable standard of care, not the ideal. Ask for a written copy of policies that all good day-care centers should be able to provide.

☐ CHECK CREDENTIALS

All staff members, including the director, should have appropriate credentials with specific training or degrees in childhood education. Find out if the center provides the staff with orientation and training. Be sure it does background checks on *all* staff.

☐ MEET WITH THE CENTER'S DIRECTOR

Before making a choice, ask about fees, extra expenses, billing, hours, holiday schedules, dropoff and pickup times and fines for late pickup, discipline, illness and injuries. Find out about the center's philosophy and goals. If the center is a preschool, be sure to ask if it stresses social and personal skills or academic ones. Determine which learning environment would be the best for your child, but remember that most children develop best when they are not pushed into an academic program at a young age.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

☐ CHILD-TO-STAFF RATIO

Some experts suggest that there be one staff member for every three children under the age of two, one staff member for every four children aged two, and one staff member for every eight children between the ages of three and six. Since young children function best in relatively small groups, the maximum group size should be no more than six for children under age two, 12 for two-year olds and 16 for children between the ages of three and six. *(Continued)*

...And then their friends

12:45 P. I ask specific Questions about their school day

Today was your Library day. Did you get a book?

☐ STAFF TURNOVER

Ask about the rate of staff turnover. A high rate may mean that your children will not receive the best care or will have to adjust to continual changes in staff. You should also find out if staff members are assigned regularly to the same group of children so the children can develop a close relationship with their care givers.

☐ NUTRITION AND HEALTH

Find out what kinds of meals and snacks are served. Are they nutritious, well-planned, plentiful and varied? Salt, fat and sugar content of meals and snacks should be kept to a minimum. Ask about rest and nap periods and if allowances are made for children who need more or less rest. Also find out about the center's policy on ill children.

☐ PLANNED ACTIVITIES

Check that there is a good balance of activities at the center. A typical day should combine active and quiet periods with lots of free-play time. Ask how the center handles discipline. Be sure you are comfortable with this policy.

☐ THE PARENT'S ROLE

Ask about your participation as a parent. Be sure that the center has an open door policy so parents can see how things are run on a day-to-day basis. Ask what kinds of reports you will receive on your child's progress and whether you will have a regular opportunity to talk with staff members. Request recommendations from other parents with children in the center. Beware of any center that will not let you contact other parents, that limits visiting time or that is unwilling to spend the time to answer your questions.

☐ OTHER CONCERNS

Speak frankly with the center's staff about such matters as discipline and child abuse. Good care givers are aware of the increasing publicity over these serious issues and should be comfortable discussing their disciplinary methods and staff screening procedures.

VISIT AND OBSERVE THE CENTER

☐ CHECK FOR CLEANLINESS

Features to consider are an easily available source of hot running water (there should be *no* basins of standing water); soap, preferably liquid; paper towels and a nearby garbage can; a clean and disinfected bathroom and diapering area; and clean kitchen countertops, stove tops and tables where the children eat.

☐ SAFETY MEASURES

See that play areas have ample room for movement without danger of injury to the children. Rooms should have no sharp-edged furniture or fragile objects. All electrical outlets not in use should be covered, paint should be lead-free and dangerous materials stored out of reach. Are smoke detectors installed in the proper place? Play equipment should be in adequate supply, checked and maintained for safety and well supervised.

☐ OBSERVE THE ATMOSPHERE

Do the children look happy, active and occupied? Are children interacting with other children and the staff? Is there a mix of group and individual activities? Try to sense if the day-care center has a friendly, "homey" atmosphere.

☐ OVERALL IMPRESSION

Take one last look around. If you were your child's age, do you think that you'd be happy and comfortable in the center?

Once you've found a center for your children, continue to monitor it. Watch for possible problems such as staff turnover. Show the staff that you are vitally concerned about your children's well-being. Participate as much as possible in activities at the center. Remember, in the best group-care centers, staff work closely with parents to help children develop into emotionally and physically healthy, happy youngsters. ☐

EMPLOYERS CAN HELP SOLVE THE CHILD-CARE CRISIS

My children would prefer I stay home with them

3:20 P.M. Of course it's hard not to worry

When Chris Pope was expecting her first child, she searched for good child care that would allow her to return to work as soon as possible after maternity leave. She settled on a day-care center that wasn't quite what she wanted for her child, but it was the best she could find.

After she dropped her son off on the first day and headed to her job with a North Carolina state agency, she was overwhelmed by uncertainty about the quality of the center. By noon she had resigned and decided to be an at-home mom.

After 18 months, Pope was ready to go back to work. This time she opted for a family day-care home and went off to her new job at a medical clinic. Still, doubts crept back as she began to realize that the care giver wasn't providing much educational stimulation. Pope wanted more for her child.

Frustrated, she thought seriously about quitting her job again, although she wanted to work. That's when a friend suggested she contact SAS Institute, a producer of computer software products in Cary, North Carolina.

"It was like an entirely different world," says Pope. There she found free on-site child care using the Montessori method of teaching. She was impressed by the quality of the care. "The care givers here always consider what's best for the child," she says, adding that the SAS facility is "unlike the family day-care home where it seemed the care giver did whatever was most convenient for her."

She found herself excited to go back to work after her second child was born. According to Pope, "The influence on-site child care has had on my life is incredible! I don't have to worry about Rachael because I know if there's a problem, I'll get a call and can go to the center. Child care is not a problem in my life anymore."

Pope is part of a small but growing number of working parents who are reaping the benefits from employer-supported child-care assistance or on-site care. Although the numbers are still low—less than one percent of U.S. corporations operate or support child-care centers—that number is slowly rising because of increasing awareness among employers of the many benefits of providing child-care assistance to families.

Official Airline Guides in Oak Brook, Illinois, reports that its company's recruiting budget has decreased from $500,000 to $50,000 since its day-care center opened in 1981. Twenty-five percent of the decrease the company attributes directly to the availability of on-site care. For example in its data processing department, which is predominantly staffed by women, the turnover rate dropped from 28 percent to two percent since day care was offered.

A 1989 report on Employer Sponsored Child Care by The Wyatt Company cited an earlier survey showing that employees with children under the age of 12 experienced higher absenteeism rates than other employees (22 percent higher), lower productivity and higher turnover. The report says that subsequent studies appear to support

REDBOOK

PTA QUESTIONNAIRE

As a reader of the National PTA Childcare Reports we are asking your assistance on a research project. Could you please take a few minutes to answer the following questions? Your cooperation will help the PTA make future issues of the magazine relevant to its readers. Thank you.

1. Which of the following best describes your overall impression of PTA Reports?
   Very favorable ____ Neutral ____
   Favorable ____ Unfavorable ____

2. How did you receive your copy of the National PTA Childcare Reports?
   At a local PTA meeting ____ In REDBOOK ____
   From a teacher ____ From a friend ____
   Sent home from school with child ____ Other ____

3a. Are you currently a member of the PTA? Yes ____ No ____

3b. If not, have you been a member in the past? Yes ____ No ____

4. How much time (in minutes) will you spend with this issue of PTA reports? ____ minutes

5. How many times will you look into this issue of PTA reports? 1–2 times ____ 3–4 times ____
   5–9 times ____ 10 or more times ____

6. Will you save this issue for future reading or reference? Yes, definitely ____ Yes, probably ____
   No ____ Will give it to a friend/relative ____

7. How many adults (18+), other than yourself, will read or look into this issue of PTA Reports?

Males in Household	0	1	2	3	4	5 or more
Males outside Household	0	1	2	3	4	5 or more
Females in Household	0	1	2	3	4	5 or more
Females outside Household	0	1	2	3	4	5 or more

8. Which of the following magazines do you subscribe to or buy regularly at the supermarket or newsstand (3 out of last 4 issues)?
   Better Homes & Gardens ____ Family Circle ____
   Good Housekeeping ____ Ladies' Home Journal ____
   Mc Call's ____ Redbook ____
   Woman's Day ____ Parents ____
   First For Women ____ Working Mother ____
   Parenting ____ Child ____
   Other(s) ____

9. Are you: Male ____ Female ____

10. What is your age? 18–24 ____ 25–34 ____ 35–44 ____ 45 or more ____

11. Please indicate the number of children in your household in each of the following age groups.
    Under 2 years ____ 6–11 years ____
    2–5 years ____ 12–17 years ____

12. What is your current employment status? Employed, full time ____ Employed, part time ____
    Not employed ____ Student ____

13. What is the highest level of education you have completed? Did not attend college ____ Attended college or more ____

14. Which of the following best describes the total income of your household?
    Under $25,000 ____ $35,000–49,999 ____
    $25,000–34,999 ____ $50,000 or more ____

15a. Would you buy PTA Reports if it were offered to your through your local PTAs?
    Yes ____ No ____ Not Sure ____

15b. If PTA Report was for sale what price would be reasonable to pay?
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If you would be willing to participate on a reader panel to help the PTA develop editorial ideas please fill in the information below:

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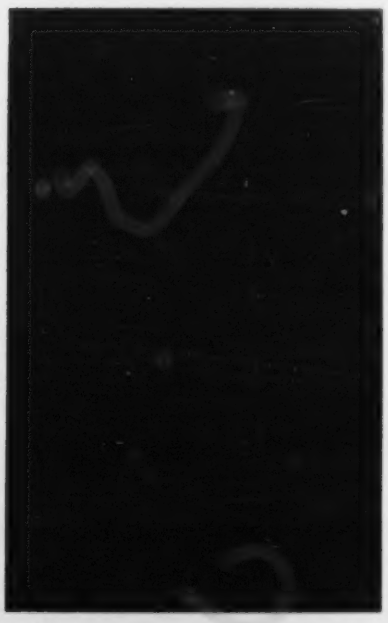
the idea that providing child-care benefits reduces costs related to absenteeism, turnover, recruitment and training. Companies can also save tax dollars because on-site centers may be depreciated as a cost of doing business. Beyond the financial benefits, studies also suggest that employee commitment and morale improve when family benefits are provided.

Steve Beatrous, a senior systems programmer at SAS Institute and child-care user, agrees that having child-care assistance "fosters commitment to the company.

"I feel grateful to the company for the benefit," Beatrous says. He believes that other employers need to be more forward-looking to see the benefit. "I've talked to friends who have their kids in other day-care centers. They spend a tremendous amount of time getting their kids back and forth, sometimes losing time from work. People will work better and harder and won't be shaving hours off their work day if they know their kids are close by. It just makes good business sense," Beatrous believes, since employees whose companies don't accommodate the needs of parents will spend valuable time and energy worrying about their children rather than about work.

According to Lynne Donges, manager of public affairs for SAS, on-site child care has met the company's goals of higher employee productivity, less absenteeism and less turnover. "It was definitely a business decision," she says of the company's move in 1981 to offer free child care. At the time, they faced large turnover rates in the growing computer science field and had a young work force with family plans to contend with. "We felt the best way to keep people was to offer on-site child care," Donges explains.



7:15 P.M.
They love it when we all get to stay home

Fortunately for working parents, more and more employers are offering family benefits. These include pre-tax salary deductions to help pay for care, employer subsidies for day-care programs selected by the parent, information and referral services, funding for nearby off-site day-care centers, family sick leave to care for ill or injured family members, flexible work time, before- and after-school programs and even summer camps, among others.

San Francisco city supervisor Nancy Walker has made employer family assistance a priority, which has led to the organization of the Bay Area Employer Child Care Coalition under the auspices of the United Way. In 1988 it launched the "One Small Step" campaign to introduce employers to a range of options and encourage commitments either to develop new child-care policies or expand existing ones.

The coalition's message is reaching employers. While the 1989 study of Bay Area employers by the Wyatt Company found that only 25 percent of the respondents offered benefits specifically designed to assist with work and family conflicts (nationally, that figure is only 17 percent), half of the companies reported they were likely to implement some type of child-care program within 12 months. The most common reasons employers gave for not sponsoring child-care programs were cost and liability concerns, followed by a lack of information.

"A lot of companies are afraid to get into this because of insurance coverage and other perceived difficulties, but you can make it work," said SAS Institute's Lynne Donges.

The Apple Computer Company provides on-site care and a nationwide referral service, and gives $500 gifts to newborns. The Campbell Soup Company subsidizes the cost to parents for its on-site center. Other major companies like Corning, Inc., fund nearby centers. And Fel-PRO, a maker of gaskets and sealing products in Skokie, Illinois, offers a summer day camp and emergency dependent home care.

While the majority of companies providing child care are large employers (500 or more employees), some

smaller companies are responding to the need, too. G.T. Water Products, Inc., a maker of drain-cleaning devices for the plumbing industry employing only 29 people in Moorpark, California, has a licensed one-room school on its premises.

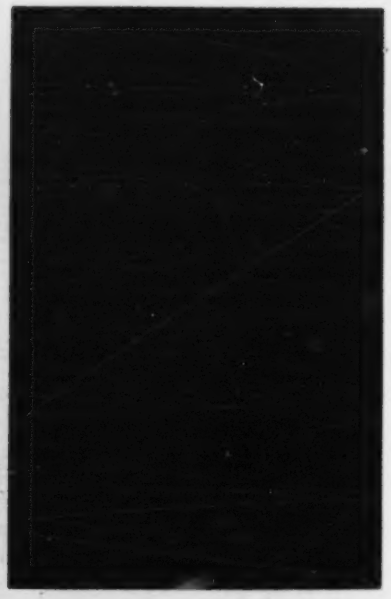
Although day-care assistance is slowly improving, few offer before- or after-school care aid, leaving millions of parents scrambling to find help.

Where help is available, having it so close to work benefits not only the parents, but the children as well. "There's no mystery place you go to work," said Chris Pope, whose son, now in school, had experienced separation anxiety when at outside care centers. "They know you're right across the street."

"It's worth a lot to me, particularly when the kids are young, to be close to them," Steve Beatrous adds. "It's nice to be able to go visit during the day and give them a hug," he said of his two children ages four and two. "My window overlooks the playground, so I can watch them when I want. Parents are curious about what their kids do during the day, but the kids don't always tell what happens. So it's nice to peek in."

But the nicest benefit may best be summed up by Pope who said, "You can't put a price tag on the peace of mind this kind of program gives you." Employers, take note. □

8:30 P.M.
They ask: 'is tomorrow our day off? oh Good!'



Christopher, Daniel, Allison, Judy, Matthew and Babe